

# France backs 'Make in India' in defence, signals new model for Rafale deal

**Saurabh Trivedi**

NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France for the G7 Summit, French diplomatic sources on Thursday said the nation's future defence cooperation with India, including the proposed Rafale fighter jet deal, will be aligned with the 'Make in India' initiative and based on an equal partnership.

France has reiterated its commitment to India's 'Make in India' programme in the defence sector, signalling that the proposed procurement of 114 Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) would be structured differently from previous defence deals.

During the visit on June 13-14, Mr. Modi is scheduled to hold bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the summit.

India is currently ad-



Narendra Modi will hold bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the G7 Summit. FILE PHOTO

vancing a mega defence acquisition programme, estimated at around ₹3.25 lakh crore, for 114 Rafale fighter aircraft from the IAF.

According to French diplomatic sources, the proposed collaboration is being envisioned as a partnership based on co-development and industrial cooperation rather than a traditional client-vendor arrangement.

"The defence programmes developed jointly by France will be fully

aligned with India's 'Make in India' requirements," a source said. The sources stressed that the partnership was based on an "equal-to-equal" approach.

Civil nuclear energy is expected to feature prominently in discussions between Mr. Macron and Mr. Modi. French officials expressed optimism about the prospects of enhanced cooperation in the nuclear sector, citing recent legislative reforms in India.

# Cong. to mount legal, political battle over rejection of Rajya Sabha papers

Party calls the issue a case of 'seat *chori*' by 'the BJP-EC *jugalbandi*'; the party plans a nation-wide agitation on inflation, unemployment, NEET paper leak, CBSE OSM row, and other issues; protest campaign likely to begin by the end of June

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday said it would challenge the rejection of its Madhya Pradesh candidate Mee-nakshi Natarajan's nomination for the Rajya Sabha election legally and politically. It also announced a nationwide campaign on issues such as inflation, unemployment, the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NE ET-UG) and other paper leaks, and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) On-Screen Marking (OSM) controversy.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the party's top leadership, presided over by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and attended by Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, party general secretaries K.C. Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and Jairam Ramesh and other leaders. In a post



**Protest rite:** Congress workers perform 'Sadbuddhi Yagya' in Bikaner over the Rajya Sabha nomination controversy. ANI

on X, Mr. Gandhi called the candidacy issue a case of seat *chori* [theft] and said that it is easier to fix elections with the help of the Election Commission rather than win them. "After vote *Chori* and *Sarkar Chori* – the BJP-EC *jugalbandi* [tie-up] has finished the contest before it has even begun with Seat *Chori*."

**'Differential treatment'** "Congress candidate Mee-nakshi Natarajanji submitted every document. No pending cases. The EC can-

celled her nomination on a frivolous BJP objection. Parimal Nathwaniji, the BJP-backed Independent, got his own name wrong on the form and skipped multiple mandatory disclosures. The EC gave him an extension to fix everything," he said. The Opposition leader added that the same EC treated two candidates very differently.

"One was disqualified without even a hearing. The other was rewarded despite not following the rules," Mr. Gandhi said.

Soon, the 60-odd Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh are likely to launch a protest against the decision of the Returning Officer in New Delhi.

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said the country was facing serious challenges, including inflation, unemployment, examination scandals and social inequality. "Paper leaks in NEET and various recruitment exams, along with controversies related to the education system, have shaken the trust of millions of youth and their families..." he said.

## New campaign in talks

"Today, unfortunately, we see that those institutions and systems which took decades to build are being deliberately weakened. Therefore, our responsibility is not only toward political struggle, but also toward safeguarding India's Constitution, democracy, and social justice," Mr. Kharge said.

The party has drawn up

a list of issues which would be highlighted in a three-four-month-long campaign. Though the exact modalities are being worked out, the campaign is expected to start by the end of June.

Mr. Gandhi is said to have urged his colleagues to stand with the people, telling them that price rise, fuel shortage, paper leaks are because of "wrong policies" of the Prime Minister. Ms. Vadra reportedly said the party should focus on a targeted campaign.

Addressing a press conference with Mr. Ramesh after the nearly three-hour meeting, Mr. Venugopal described recent developments in Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand as a matter of "great worry".

Calling the Madhya Pradesh episode "seat *chori*", he said the developments reflected the "pathetic condition of Indian democracy". "Today's meeting discussed the matter in detail. We will fight this politically and legally," he said.

# Shah vows to remove AFSPA from almost all N-E States next year

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA, will be withdrawn from the entire Northeast (N-E) next year, barring one or two States.

Speaking at the signing of a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the Centre, Assam and Nagaland to facilitate mineral oil operations in the Assam-Nagaland boundary areas, he said shrinking of areas covered under AFSPA is an indicator of peace. "I am confident that barring one or two States, we will withdraw AFSPA from the entire Northeast next year," he said.

Underlining that the signing of the MoU was a "historic moment", Mr. Shah said it has removed the last hurdle in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a developed Northeast.

Oil exploration activities remained stalled for more than three decades in the disputed area belt along the Assam-Nagaland border due to jurisdictional differences.

"This will open new avenues for mineral exploration in the Northeast. The area not only has oil and gas but huge mineral deposits, which could not be explored due to law and order issues," he said.



Amit Shah in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

With just one MoU, the extraction capacity of 1,000-1,500 barrels per day can be increased by 10 times, Mr. Shah said.

## 'Increased capacity'

"In one field alone, there are possibilities of recovery of more than ₹15,000 crore. If we extract the oil deposits spread across Nagaland, we would be able to reduce dependence on foreign countries for our oil needs," he said.

Mr. Shah added that since Mr. Modi took charge, he kept his focus on the Northeast and became the PM with the highest number of visits to the region. Since 2019, 12 accords have been signed between various groups and State governments, resulting in a drop of around 80% in incidents of violence in the region, he said. "The development of both Assam and Nagaland remained hampered for a long time because a consensus could not be reached for an MoU. It is the best example of cooperative federalism," he said.

# How a TMC split may alter Parliament arithmetic, strengthen NDA's hand

Deeptiman Tiwary

New Delhi, June 11

THE POLITICAL crisis engulfing the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has the potential to alter the Parliament arithmetic in ways that could have significant implications for the Narendra Modi government's legislative agenda, including its plans to revive the contentious delimitation legislation during the forthcoming Monsoon Session.

With rebel leaders claiming the support of 20 of the TMC's 28 Lok Sabha MPs, seven AAP Rajya Sabha MPs having already merged with the BJP earlier this year, and three more TMC members resigning from the Upper House amid the current turmoil, the Opposition's parliamentary strength is undergoing its biggest realignment since the splits in the Shiv Sena in 2022 and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in 2023.

The developments come at a time when the Opposition has already been weakened by the breakdown of the Congress-DMK alliance after the Congress aligned itself with Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) following the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.

The NDA currently commands the support of about 293 MPs in the 543-member Lok Sabha. Rebel TMC leaders claim the support of 20 of the party's 28 Lok Sabha MPs and have indicated their willingness to back the government. If those numbers hold, the government's effective support base rises from 293 to 313 MPs.

The significance of the shift becomes apparent when viewed against the April vote on the delimitation-linked constitutional



TMC chief Mamata Banerjee in New Delhi earlier this week. ANI FILE

amendment. Despite retaining the support of all NDA constituents and receiving backing from several non-aligned parties, the government was able to secure only 298 votes and failed to pass the legislation.

The addition of 20 TMC MPs would theoretically raise the government's demonstrated support base from 298 to 318 votes, substantially improving its position compared to the earlier attempt.

What could add to this is the timing of the TMC crisis. It comes at a time when the Opposition's parliamentary architecture is already under strain. The Congress-DMK alliance has collapsed following Congress's decision to align with the TVK in Tamil Nadu.

The split weakens one of the strongest pillars of the INDIA bloc and opens the possibility of issue-based cooperation between the DMK and the government on specific legislative matters. The DMK has 22 Lok Sabha MPs.

If the party were to support a

delimitation-linked constitutional amendment, the government's potential support base would rise from 313 to 335 MPs. That would be just 25 short of the two-third majority in the current Lok Sabha.

The two-thirds mark in the full 543-member Lok Sabha is 362. However, three Lok Sabha seats are currently vacant – Barishat in West Bengal, Shillong in Meghalaya and Nowgong in Assam – reducing the effective strength of the House to 540. That brings the effective two-thirds threshold down to 360.

While 335 would still not guarantee the passage of a constitutional amendment, it would place the government within striking distance of the required numbers and provide the BJP leadership with a considerably stronger platform for floor management on the day of voting.

In practical terms, the government would no longer need to build an entirely new coalition around a constitutional amendment. Instead, it would need to secure a much smaller number

of additional votes through support, abstentions or absences in the Opposition ranks.

## Immediate impact in Rajya Sabha

The Upper House numbers are evolving in stages. The BJP's strength had already risen to 113 after the merger of seven former AAP Rajya Sabha MPs. The NDA's tally consequently climbed to around 148 members.

The TMC crisis has now created a second opening. Three TMC Rajya Sabha MPs have resigned, reducing the party's strength from 13 to 10 and creating three vacancies.

If NDA-backed candidates secure all three seats in ensuing by-elections, the NDA's tally would rise from approximately 148 to 151. The two-third majority mark in the Rajya Sabha is 163 members.

The more consequential development lies in the West Bengal Assembly. Rebel leaders claim the support of 58 of the TMC's 80 MLAs, leaving Mamata Banerjee with only 22 legislators.

Those numbers have direct implications for future Rajya Sabha elections. Under the Rajya Sabha electoral formula, a party's ability to elect MPs depends on the number of MLAs it has in the state Assembly. With only 22 MLAs, the Mamata Banerjee faction would struggle to elect a Rajya Sabha member independently in future election cycles.

The TMC's current Rajya Sabha contingent may not disappear immediately, but it could steadily shrink as existing members complete their terms.



OPHELIA YUMLEMBAM

INDIA'S DECISION to accord Min Aung Hlaing a high-profile reception a few days ago signals a notable shift in its approach toward Myanmar. Moving beyond its previous wait-and-watch approach, New Delhi appears willing to engage directly with the administration in Naypyidaw in pursuit of its strategic, security, and economic interests.

For Myanmar, India was a logical choice for the new administration's first state visit. First, Naypyidaw is seeking to diversify its foreign policy and reduce its heavy reliance on China. For years, Beijing's practice of playing both sides — engaging both the military regime and certain ethnic groups — has created unease within Myanmar's leadership, which increasingly seeks

# India-Myanmar ties will remain limited

greater diplomatic manoeuvrability. Second, the military's control remains weakest in western and southwestern Myanmar along the Indian border, especially Rakhine State. This region is of importance to India as it hosts key Act East Policy (AEP) investments. Finally, economic considerations may have been a major driver of the visit. Myanmar's economy remains far below its pre-coup trajectory, with high inflation, weak growth, and nearly half of the population living in poverty.

India has good reason for deepening its engagement. The rise in refugee flows, cross-border insurgent activity, illicit trafficking networks and other non-traditional security threats has heightened concerns. The prolonged delays in key connectivity projects under the AEP have added to the urgency. While demonstrating a willingness to engage with the new administration in Myanmar, India also

underscored that its core national interests remain non-negotiable.

China is another important factor. For Myanmar, closer engagement with India offers an opportunity to reduce excessive dependence on China. For New Delhi, deeper engagement with Naypyidaw serves as a means of balancing Chinese influence in India's immediate neighbourhood. But achieving either objective will be challenging. Over the past five years, while many countries limited their engagement with Myanmar's junta, China continued to provide political, economic, and military support. Naypyidaw is unlikely to move away from its long-standing "Pauk-Phaw" relationship with Beijing. Unless alternative partners can offer comparable levels of support, investment, and security cooperation, China will remain Myanmar's most consequential external partner. Given the circumstances, India is

neither willing nor positioned to match China's level of engagement.

The absence of major agreements, substantial new commitments, or significant MoUs during Min Aung Hlaing's trip underscores that while India is prepared to engage, it remains reluctant to significantly expand cooperation as long as Myanmar's internal conflict and political uncertainties persist. Ultimately, the long-term trajectory of the relationship will depend largely on how the new administration in Myanmar manages its own political and security challenges and proves its commitment to addressing India's security concerns. Until its political and security landscape becomes more stable, India-Myanmar ties are likely to remain pragmatic, cautious, and limited in scope.

*The writer is a research associate at the Organisation for Research on China and Asia*

LOWERS ITS GLOBAL GROWTH OUTLOOK FOR 2026 TO 2.5% AMID ESCALATING CONFLICT IN WEST ASIA

# World Bank raises India's FY27 growth forecast to 6.6%

ENS Economic Bureau  
New Delhi, June 11

THE WORLD Bank marginally raised its growth outlook for India to 6.6% from 6.5% for the financial year 2027 (FY27), even as it cut its global growth forecast for 2026 to 2.5% due to the war in the West Asia.

In its June 2026 Global Economic Prospects report, the World Bank raised India's growth estimate for FY28 by 0.6 percentage point to 7.2%.

"Despite heightened uncertainty related to the conflict, economic activity in India remained robust early this year, supported by resilient domestic demand," the World Bank said, adding that private consumption, particularly in rural areas, has been strong, with urban demand recovering. Collections of taxes from domestic sales have also in-

creased steadily. To mitigate price pressures arising from higher energy costs, as well as shortages of agricultural products, especially fertilizers, several measures have been implemented in India, including a reduction in fuel taxes.

However, it said the moderation in growth from 7.7% in FY26 to an estimated 6.6% in FY27 reflects a slowdown in private demand growth owing to higher energy prices and other input costs, although a reduction in Goods and Services Tax rates should provide some support to consumer demand.

"Reduced US tariffs and the expected implementation of free trade agreements will likely mitigate the impact of weaker external demand due to the conflict, particularly on merchandise exports. Growth is then anticipated to rebound



In several economies, including India, fiscal deficits are anticipated to rise, the Bank said. FILE

over the next two financial years, driven by firming domestic demand and a pickup in export growth," it said.

In several economies, including India, fiscal deficits are anticipated to rise, partly owing to increases in subsidies

intended to counter surges in energy prices, it said.

In India, reduced revenues due to tax reforms are forecast to be partly offset by slower capital expenditure growth and reductions in non-essential current spending, it added.

"Over the forecast horizon, trade agreements and structural reforms undertaken to improve the business environment are set to support foreign direct investment inflows in India," the World Bank said.

The Bank cut its global growth forecast for 2026 to 2.5% due to the war in the Middle East and said growth could slow to just 1.3% if energy supply disruptions prove more severe and are accompanied by substantial stress in financial markets.

Global growth reached 2.9% in 2025, the Bank said in its semi-annual Global Economic Prospects report, up 0.2 percentage point from its estimate in January. Its 2026 forecast is down 0.1 percentage point from January and would mark the weakest growth rate since the COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019. FE

## FM: Strengthen multilateral cooperation to tackle challenges

New Delhi: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the adverse impact of conflicts and uncertainty falls disproportionately on developing countries and the Global South, and there is a need for coordinated global action to deal with it.

Addressing the 'Global Convergence for Growth Summit', the finance minister said there is a need to strengthen multilateral cooperation to build resilient economies, accelerate sustainable development, and ensure inclusive growth that benefits everyone. PTI

# 'India likely to be invited to join Hormuz security initiative'

**Saurabh Trivedi**  
**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's bilateral talks with French President Emmanuel Macron at the G7 Summit, France has proposed a broader maritime security partnership with India, including participation in a multinational initiative aimed at ensuring freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

French diplomatic sources said here on Thursday discussions between the two leaders are expected to cover a wide range of issues, including defence cooperation, maritime security, military hardware and developments in West Asia.

**Discussions between Modi and Macron are expected to cover a wide range of issues: diplomatic sources**

According to the sources, France is working with a group of partner nations to ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz amid rising regional tensions.

India is expected to be among the countries invited to join the initiative. The sources also revealed that leaders from India, the United States, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are expected to participate in a West Asia-focused meeting on the margins of the G7

**Summit.**

Briefing the media about Prime Mr. Modi's upcoming travel plans for France and Slovakia, Secretary (West) Sibi George of the Ministry of External Affairs said when Mr. Modi and Mr. Macron meet, "All issues of interest – global issues – including the developments in West Asia will be discussed."

Hinting at the French proposal on working with a group of partner countries for the Strait of Hormuz, he said "new announcements being made by various sides" will be discussed as well.

Mr. George further said that defence-related announcements will be made during Mr. Modi's visit to Slovakia during June 14-16.

# U.S. attacks third ship with Indian seafarers, crew safe

External Affairs Ministry says 'deeply worried' by attacks but blames conflict in the region; U.S. Centcom says missiles were fired into *Jalveer's* engine room as directions were not complied with

**The Hindu Bureau**

CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

**U**.S. forces attacked a merchant ship carrying Indian seafarers for the third time in four days. Thursday's attack was on Guinea-Bissau flagged bitumen carrier *Jalveer* off the port of Shinas, Oman.

The vessel had 20 Indian seafarers, and they were safe, said Mukesh Mangal, Additional Secretary of the Ports, Shipping and Waterways Ministry. "As per the latest information, evacuation [of crew] to Shinas port has commenced," Mr. Mangal said at an inter-ministerial briefing on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the External Affairs Ministry had summoned the U.S. Chargé d'affaires Jason Meeks and lodged a "strong protest" regarding the attacks.

On Thursday, the Ministry, while emphasising that the "attacks came from the U.S. Navy stationed there", described the strikes as "deeply worrisome" but blamed them on the ongoing conflict between U.S.-Israel and Iran in the re-



The commercial vessel *Jalveer* attacked off the coast of Oman on Thursday. FORWARD SEAMEN'S UNION OF INDIA/ANI

gion. U.S. Centcom has said in a statement that two Hellfire missiles were fired into *Jalveer's* engine room after the "crew repeatedly failed to comply with directions from U.S. forces". The ship was attacked for "attempting to transport Iranian oil."

*Jalveer's* safety manager is an Indian company located in Chembur, Mumbai, as per the Equasis database.

U.S. aircraft attacked Palau-flagged tankers *Mari-vex* and *Settebello* on Monday and Wednesday, respectively. Three Indian seafarers on *Settebello* died

in the attack, which the Indian government confirmed on Thursday.

The three attacks have targeted the engine rooms of the ships and sometimes the steering compartment but above the waterline. This would render the ship without the means to move or manoeuvre but not sink it. The Directorate General of Shipping had issued an advisory mid-February asking seafarer recruiters and shipowners not to deploy seafarers on ships calling on Iranian ports. An official source said the crew onboard the three vessels had joined before

the advisory was issued.

Family members of seafarer Aditya Sharma (23), a deck cadet on *Settebello* who was among the dead, urged the government of Himachal Pradesh, where they live, and the Centre to get his body back to the native Galore village in Hamirpur so that his last rites could be performed. Sharma was planning to visit home in May but decided to extend his stay at the vessel for a month, they said.

The official spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry Randhir Jaiswal said efforts are under way to bring back the mortal remains of the dead.

Condemning the attacks, the Congress said in a statement that PM Narendra Modi had "repeatedly showcased his personal rapport with President Donald Trump as a diplomatic achievement" and that Mr. Modi should "not evade responsibility when that relationship fails to protect Indian lives and interests."

(Inputs from Kallol Bhattacharjee, M. Kalyanaraman and PTI)

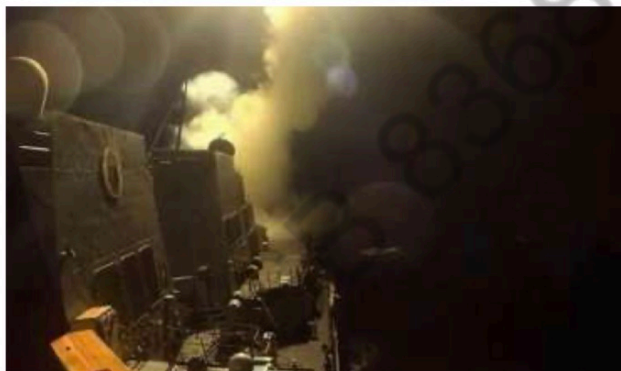
# Trump backs off from Iran strikes, signals deal is likely

Tehran has 'approved' talks, says the U.S. President while announcing pause on attacks hours after threatening to hit Iran 'very hard', seize Kharg Island; Hormuz blockade to 'remain till deal finalised'

**Stanly Johny**

**A**fter two days of tit-for-tat strikes with Iran, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said he would pause further attacks, just hours after threatening to hit the country "very hard" and seize Kharg Island and its energy infrastructure. He claimed that Tehran had "approved" talks.

"Based on the fact that discussions with the Islamic Republic of Iran have been brought to the highest level of Iranian leadership and approved, I have, as President of the United States of America, cancelled the scheduled strikes and bombings against Iran this evening," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post on Thursday night. "Discussions and final points have been, in



A screengrab from a video released by the U.S. CENTCOM on Thursday shows strikes targeting 'Iranian infrastructure'. AFP

both concept and great detail, approved by all parties involved, including the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Turkey, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt, and others," he said adding that the U.S. naval blockade of Iranian ports "will remain in full force and effect until this transaction is finalised – Time and place of the

signing to be announced shortly."

Earlier in the day, Mr. Trump had written in another post that he would continue striking Iran after both sides exchanged fire for two consecutive nights. After Thursday's attack, Iran also announced that it closed the Strait of Hormuz to all traffic.

In recent months, Mr.

Trump had made several U-turns after making harsh threats against Iran and issuing ultimatums, often claiming progress in talks.

After Mr. Trump threatened to take Kharg Island, Mohammad-Bagher Ghali-baf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, had warned that any further escalation would lead to an explosion of energy infrastructure and markets. "Wrong strategies and impulsive decisions will reset the entire board for the worse, explode energy infrastructure and markets that you will be stuck in for years. You will see a different Iran," he wrote in a social media post.

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# Twenty-two countries tell Iran to stop attacking people 'on our soil'

The countries accuse Iran's security services of using international and local criminal gangs to plot lethal actions against dissidents, journalists and communities abroad; such attacks undermine the national sovereignty, says a joint statement

**Agence France-Presse**

SYDNEY

**T**wenty-two countries, including the United States and European nations, jointly warned Iran on Thursday to stop attacking people "on our soil".

Iran's security services were condemned for their "deplorable" use of international and local criminal gangs for plots in Europe, North America, and Australia.

"Attempts to kill, kidnap, harass, intimidate, or otherwise attack people on our soil, undermines national sovereignty and international norms. These



**Security services:** Members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) attend a rally in Tehran, Iran. REUTERS

actions must stop immediately," the countries said in a joint statement.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' intelligence services and its fo-

reign operations branch, the Quds Force, had engaged in "lethal plotting and malign actions" against Iranian dissidents, journalists and Jewish and

Israeli communities and interests, they said. "We stand united in our determination to protect our countries and our people against these threats. The Islamic Republic of Iran must halt these actions."

The countries also accused Iran of being behind a campaign of attacks across Europe targeting Jewish communities, Iranian journalists and U.S. journalists that were claimed by Iran-linked group Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya (HAYI).

The group, whose name means The Islamic Movement of the People of the Right Hand, has claimed responsibility for attacks

targeting Jewish communities in the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands.

In November, Australia designated the Revolutionary Guards as a state sponsor of terrorism, describing its alleged attacks in Australia as "unprecedented and dangerous acts of aggression".

The statement was issued by Albania, Australia, Belgium, Britain, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the United States.

IRANIANS INCLUDE 2 WOMEN WHO FACE POTENTIAL TORTURE IF FORCED TO RETURN

# US plans to deport Iranians to Central African Republic

Reuters

Darkar, Nairobi, June 11

THE TRUMP administration plans to deport a number of Iranians and other migrants to Central African Republic, a chronically unstable country racked by violence and poverty, two lawyers and an official briefed on the matter told Reuters.

The Iranians include two women who face potential torture and persecution if they are forced to go back to Iran, their lawyer, Emily Trostle, said. One is a Christian convert and the other is a pro-democracy activist, she added.

The US State Department and the presidency in the Central African Republic — which recently reached a deal to accept so-called third-country deportees from the US — did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Both the women were detained upon arriving in the U.S. in November 2024, Trostle said. They applied for asylum in the U.S. and had secured a form of protection known as withholding of removal from a US



Iranian women shop at a local market in Tehran on Thursday. REUTERS

immigration judge, Trostle said.

The official briefed on the matter told Reuters the first flight to Central African Republic under the deal was expected to take about 20 people, also including Syrians and Afghans. The plane could leave as early as Thursday, the two lawyers said.

Another source familiar with the preparations said one Turkish national was also expected to be deported.

The Trump administration

has used third-country deportation deals — including with Central African Republic's neighbour the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is now facing an Ebola outbreak — to deport people it can't legally send home. Washington has defended the deals as lawful, though rights groups and advocates have said the details of the deals are opaque and many of the deportees are ultimately repatriated.

## US lawmakers: Do not send Afghan allies to unsafe countries

DOZENS OF US lawmakers urged President Donald Trump's administration on Thursday to roll back any plans to ship to unsafe third countries Afghan nationals who worked with US forces during the war in their homeland. In a letter, more than 80 House of Representatives members appealed to Secretary of State Marco Rubio to reconsider plans for 1,100 Afghans who have been stranded in Qatar awaiting relocation.

"It's both a moral and a national security imperative that our country live up to its promise and watch out for those who put themselves in harm's way to help keep us safe," Democratic Representative Jason Crow of Colorado, a former Army Ranger who led the letter, said in a statement. REUTERS

# UK Defence Secy resigns, says PM Starmer failing to commit resources

Reuters

London, June 11

BRITISH DEFENCE Secretary John Healey quit on Thursday in a dispute over military spending, accusing Prime Minister Keir Starmer of failing to commit the resources that are needed to keep the country safe from heightened threats. The unexpected resignation, accompanied by a scathing public letter, compounds the pressure on Starmer when he is facing a likely leadership challenge and exposes the crisis at the heart of the British government — how it can ramp up defence spending when there is little money to spare and the welfare budget keeps rising.

Healey had been locked in talks with Starmer and Finance Secretary Rachel Reeves for months over how to meet the additional military spending needed, delaying Britain's Defence Investment Plan, which was due last year.

“You have been unable, and the Treasury has been unwilling, to commit the resources



John Healey

that the nation needs to defend the country at this time of rising threats,” Healey said in his letter to Starmer.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he would “always do what is needed to keep our country safe” after John Healey resigned as defence minister, countering Healey's claim that the government had failed to fund the military adequately.

“You are also right that we have to go further,” Starmer told Healey in a letter, after the former defence minister said the prime minister and the Treasury had been unable and unwilling to commit the resources needed to defend the country.